

**MINUTES OF THE
CHILD WELFARE LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT PANEL**
Thursday, October 19, 2006 – 2:00 p.m. – Room W020 House Building

Members Present:

Sen. Dan R. Eastman, Senate Chair
Rep. Steven R. Mascaro, House Chair
Sen. Gene Davis
Rep. David Litvack
Rep. Paul Ray

Staff Present:

Mr. Mark D. Andrews, Policy Analyst
Mr. Thomas R. Vaughn, Associate General Counsel
Ms. Wendy L. Bangerter, Legislative Secretary

Note: A list of others present, copy of related materials, and an audio recording of the meeting can be found at www.le.utah.gov.

1. Committee Business

Chair Mascaro called the meeting to order at 2:45 p.m.

MOTION: Rep. Ray moved to approve the minutes of the July 12, 2006 meeting. The motion passed unanimously. Sen. Davis and Rep. Litvack were absent for the vote.

2. Guardian ad Litem Oversight Committee

Ms. Debra Moore, chair of the GAL (Guardian ad Litem) Oversight Committee of the Utah Judicial Council, distributed and reviewed the "Utah Office of the Guardian ad Litem and CASA" Annual 2005-2006 report. She addressed the guardian ad litem caseload which she feels does not permit the GAL to adequately serve children.

Ms. Kristin Brewer, Director, Office of the Guardian ad Litem, emphasized that the biggest challenge her office faces is large caseloads. She reviewed the Office's FY 08 budget request. She noted that ideally each guardian ad litem should represent only 100 children and that caseloads around the country are abysmal.

3. Guardian ad Litem Budget

The Panel further discussed the GAL's budget. Rep. Mascaro indicated that, from a risk management perspective, caseload quantities should be addressed now before they become the subject of a lawsuit.

MOTION: Sen. Davis moved that, after having reviewed the issues of the Office of the Guardian ad Litem, the Panel note its support of the GAL's FY 08 budget request. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Refugee Populations

Ms. Lisa-Michelle Church, Executive Director, Department of Human Services, distributed "Ethnic Distribution of Staff and Clients - Salt Lake City" and "Ethnic Distribution of Staff and Clients - Salt Lake Region." Ms. Church reported on town hall meetings she has held around the state with community leaders and efforts by the DCFS (Division of Child and Family Services) to better serve refugee and ethnic populations.

5. Child Welfare and Substance Abuse

Mr. Brent Kelsey, Assistant Director, Department of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, said that close to 80 percent of children in the custody of the state have parents who use drugs or alcohol. He noted the rise in the number of women using methamphetamines who are entering the public substance abuse treatment system. These women have a higher prevalence than men of mental health problems as a primary comorbidity and are more likely than men to have a history of physical and sexual abuse.

Mr. Kelsey provided estimates for the costs of providing substance abuse treatment at four levels of intensity (see copy of presentation distributed at the meeting). He underscored the importance of providing treatment to parents to minimize future drug and alcohol use by their children.

Mr. Kelsey reported that treatment in residential settings accounts for only 2 percent of admissions in rural Utah but 15 percent in urban areas of the state; also, that he is not aware of any residential treatment facilities beyond the Wasatch Front. He said that most people in treatment require only low or moderate levels of service but that the need for additional services is greatest at the higher end of the continuum, beyond the Wasatch Front, and for mothers and children.

Mr. Richard Anderson, Director, DCFS, estimated that there are 200–300 children in the child welfare system who could be served in a residential substance abuse treatment setting with their mothers.

Mr. Anderson said that there is a high degree of sexualizing behavior associated with meth use; that meth parents potentially experience brain damage that can take six months to treat before DCFS can even work with them; that, in the future, many more parents could be deprived of their parental rights, many more children could end up in foster care, and more children could become addicted at a younger age; that children need to be included in the treatment services received by their parents; and that DCFS and others helping families need to work as teams.

Mr. Anderson suggested that there may need to be a debate about whether to automatically remove a child from a home where the parents use meth. At this time, there is no such policy

and families are dealt with on a case by case basis. If such a policy were adopted, the policy would have to be supported by treatment resources.

Dr. David Barnes, MD, testified that one of the highest causes of death among 20-year old women is heart problems and he attributed that to meth use.

6. Other Business

The Panel discussed whether to meet again during the interim. No additional meetings were scheduled.

7. Adjourn

MOTION: Sen. Davis moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Mascaro adjourned the meeting at 4:10 p.m.